



Detour de France: An Englishman in Search of a Continental Education

Michael Simkins

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Though happy enough with his lot, Michael Simkins has never truly shaken the nagging doubt—helpfully upheld by his partner Julia—that he somehow lacks worldly sophistication. While she spent her teenage years as a nanny on a boat moored at Cannes, his utter lack of travel experience (Weymouth, Cleethorpes, and a day trip to Dieppe) still has the power to shock people into leaving dinner parties early. So as he hits middle-age, Michael takes up the challenge of broadening his horizons. He decides to improve himself in the same way English gentlemen lacking refined edges have for centuries: by learning from their more cultured French neighbours. Michael, an English provincial ingenue, sets off to discover just what the Gallic nation can teach him and the rest of us Anglo-Saxons about living the good life. Armed only with *50 Useful Phrases in French*, he waits to see if his odyssey from La Manche to the Riviera will finally turn him from the scotch-egg eating spawn of Anne Widdecombe and John McCririck into the champagne-sipping love child of Serge Gainsbourg and Catherine Deneuve. Julia is saying a prayer for him at Lourdes.

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